



CAPE ELIZABETH HIGH SCHOOL

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October 9, 2019

Yesterday two staff members at CEHS received an email from a person claiming to be from Dunsmuir, California. Somebody with no connection to this school. Who has never set foot in it.

The email was titled "Remove you he Offenders." It started:

"Whoever is responsible (every single one of you) for this ridiculously biased B.S. should removed now....and forevermore. That includes YOU.

"Idiots. Disgusting."

Yesterday I received an anonymous email titled "Your paternalist misogyny is showing, sir..."

Yesterday, two secretaries calmly handled separate calls from the same ranting gentleman from western New York state. who concluded his tirade by saying he was thinking of driving to CEHS. I referred that one to the police. Along with one other.

This has to stop.

On September 16, the tenth day of our new school year, three of our students who were well motivated, with good intentions, made a really bad choice. They posted notes in two of our bathrooms claiming there is a "rapist" in CEHS.

And here's where the heroes of this story, as far as I'm concerned, step in: the students who *brought word of these notes to us within minutes of their posting.* They were alarmed by what the notes said. They knew posting notes in the bathroom was the wrong way to raise such concerns. They trusted us to act.

And so we started the first of our 47 interviews involving four CEHS administrators and our school resource officer over the next three weeks. As we first started our interviews, we had two paramount questions we needed to answer: Is the school safe? Is there a rapist in school?

We knew from last year that a legal process had been started by one student against another based on an incident away from school grounds. In my many years as a school administrator, this is not the first time—and it will not be the last— where students have made claims to the police against other students. They have every right to do that. Any experienced school administrator in every school in the country has had similar experiences.

In those situations, we support *both* students as the claims work themselves through the legal, evidence-gathering process. We take steps to make sure both students feel safe and supported. In this case, the girl and her family ultimately decided, before that process was complete, to pursue the

case no further. That is their choice. It should be honored. Even though the legal process is over, we continue to monitor this situation to be sure our students are safe.

At the beginning of our investigation, we checked in with the girl involved in the legal complaint situation. She said she feels safe and supported in CEHS. Unfortunately, as this story evolved, I'm sorry to say, we had to disrupt her school day about four more times for additional followup questions. At each subsequent check-in, she reports feeling safe. She feels supported. She wants to come to school to learn and to grow in her classes and to enjoy the day to day experiences with her friends.

And as we conducted those 47 interviews, we uncovered rumors about two other alleged situations involving a CEHS student who was the clearly intended target of the sticky note messages. There was a rumor of a video supposedly showing horrifying images. Within hours, through student assistance, we got access to two, ten-second Snapchat videos that were the basis of the rumors. These students, in my mind, were the next group of heroes in this situation—students who trusted us with the videos.

The videos did not show what the rumor mill said they showed. Not even close. Not surprising.

Rumor mills in high schools are often wrong. What adult isn't familiar with that reality from our own high school experiences?

We tracked down the girls in the videos, young women now, who never attended CEHS. They explained what was happening in the videos. Again, the rumors were not true.

Through our investigation, another rumor surfaced based on an alleged incident following one of our recent proms. We checked with the student who was the alleged victim according to that rumor. There was no truth to the rumor, she said. Unfortunately, as this investigation evolved, we had to check in with this student, too, multiple additional times, for further followup. On each occasion, she says she feels safe in CEHS and supported. She just wants to be in school, participate on her teams, enjoy her friends, and learn.

During most of this investigation, the young man who was the target of the sticky notes stayed away from school—he missed a total of eight days of school. He felt unsafe.

His family said this felt like bullying and asked to look into that. That is their right.

The student is back now. He's had many CEHS classmates who have reached out to and supported him—an increasing number, in fact, as this story about CEHS has gained national traction.

This has been a challenging and sometime frustrating three weeks at CEHS. So let me describe the CEHS I know:

- Our students are caring, respectful, hardworking, and thoughtful.
- We serve families who care deeply about education and entrust us with their respectful sons and daughters.

- The teachers at CEHS care deeply about the students in their classes. For the last three weeks, they have been walking on egg shells, wondering about their school, what they can say, and worried that what they say could be misinterpreted.
- The secretaries and support staff care deeply. They know our students by name. In many cases they know their parents, their brothers, and sisters.
- We have three caring counselors in our school counseling department who don't deserve to be called "Idiots. Disgusting" by people in Dunsuir, California, or anyplace else, who have no idea what they're talking about.
- CEHS is blessed with two skilled social workers who take their jobs incredibly seriously. They do hard work with grace and passion to support our students. They come in on weekends and summer days when students with whom they are working are in need.
- I have an Assistant Principal, Nate Carpenter, who cares so deeply about young people that he wears his heart on his sleeve. He's had family members contact him based on the recent publicity, sharing questions that they are hearing from others wondering about the kind of school we are.

In the spring of 2015, a girl in my advisory group came to me with a social worker who had been supporting her. She knew I cared about her. She knew the social worker cared about her.

She was the victim of a sexual assault, she told me. Her idea, supported by the social worker, was for CEHS to support a full day of sexual assault and consent training for all of our juniors and seniors. Throughout the following year, a dedicated group of students, staff, and community members worked alongside this young lady, to organize our first all-day SAAFE (Sexual Assault Awareness For Everyone) event. This was a year before the MeToo movement hit the national airwaves.

In 2018, we held our second such event.

Next spring we'll hold our third.

We have always supported and cared about our students—all our students—and will continue to do so.

We always have things to learn and to do better at CEHS. That's true for me. In the past few months, I've learned a lot about the tricky nuances of Title IX, Maine's mandated reporting requirement that differs depending on whether the abuser is a member of the young person's family or not, and about the complicated intersections between federal and state law surrounding mandated reporting. I have done and will do my job better as a result of the events of last spring and the past four weeks.

Over the next few weeks, as the recent national attention to CEHS fades, we will continue to go about our jobs of educating students, staff, and parents about all of these topics related to sexual

assault. That's important work. We take it seriously. We all can learn and grow from this. That is what CEHS is about.

The students who posted the sticky notes made a bad choice even though their intentions were good. People were hurt by those bad choices.

The students regret their choices, I'm sure. They will learn. We don't expect perfection of our students. We freely give second chances.

When any student returns from suspension, a consequence we rarely assign, we welcome them back. Their slate is clean. When the students become seniors, provided that they have had good records since then, they can request that the record of a one and only suspension be expunged. We've had that process in place for years.

To the adults, including adults in the media, who are giving credence to the sticky note assertions made with zero support in any findings following a school or legal investigatory process, shame on you. You are passing along rumors as if they were established fact. They are not.

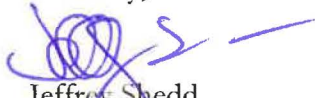
If there are any parents who want to learn more about this situation, we will have opportunities for that over the next few weeks.

If there are parents who wish to meet with Mr. Carpenter or me in the meantime, give us a call. We'd be happy to answer your questions. We'll walk you around the school, and you can see for yourself what the vibe is in the hallways of CEHS.

And to the author of the emails from Dunsmuir, California, I will pass along an offer Mr. Carpenter and I make on a regular basis to students, parents, community members, and visitors: our doors are open to you, come on in for a visit.

I am proud to be CEHS's principal. I am proud of the student heroes who came to us and shared with us. I have every confidence we will grow as staff, students, and a community from this.

Sincerely,



Jeffrey Shedd
Principal